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## Policies & Procedures

### Next Gen update

Next Gen Updates & index, training slides, energy vendor and mechanical contractor tools, etc. are here: <https://mn-commerce.box.com/s/jq4dq5nrytgkpsmkissaut5dwqa6t88>

### Mechanical contractor reports feature

Last week, Commerce EAP informed all mechanical contractors about a new “Contractor Reports” eHEAT feature and provided the attached instructions on adding this feature to user groups and profiles. This gives user access to an “ERR Task by Contractor” report.

### Affordability programs

Per Service Provider request, Commerce EAP compiled the following list of known affordability programs.

**Xcel Energy** - Programs administered by Energy CENTS Coalition

Gas Affordability Program (GAP) – Open

- Discount on gas bill based on household income and energy use.
- Households with past due balances will also receive a monthly credit towards their balance.
- Household must receive EAP funds for the current heating season.

Power On – Open

- Discount on electric bill based on household income and energy use.
- Households with past due balances will also receive a monthly credit towards their balance.
- Household must receive EAP funds for the current heating season.

Medical Affordability Program – Open

- Discount on electric bill based on household income and energy use.
- Households with past due balances will also receive a monthly credit towards their balance.
- Household must meet income guidelines but do not have to be on EAP.
- Households must have an active Medical Certification form on file with Xcel Energy.

**Payment Relief Plan – Expected to be available mid-May or early June**

- LIHEAP eligibility is not required.
- Residential electric customers owing between \$1,000 and \$4,000 are eligible to participate. They must have an active account (not finalized).
- Funding will cover 75% of the customer's balance through bill credits – 25% when they sign up for a pay arrangement, and 50% spread over the length of the repayment period of 12 months. (Extensions are available on a case-by-case basis.)
- Customers call in to setup payment plans and are referred for the plan if they meet the criteria
- Once open, enrollment will be available until March 2023, or until all program funds are allocated.

**CenterPoint****GAP – Open**

- Discount on gas bill based on household income and energy use.
- Households with past due balances will also receive a monthly credit towards their balance.
- Household must receive EAP funds for the current heating season.

**MERC** – Administered by The Salvation Army**GAP – Open**

- Discount on gas bill based on household income and energy use.
- Households with past due balances will also receive a monthly credit towards their balance.
- Household must receive EAP funds for the current heating season.

**Greater MN Gas** – Administered by Energy CENTS Coalition**GAP – Open**

- Discount on gas bill based on household income and energy use.
- Households with past due balances will also receive a monthly credit towards their balance.
- Household must receive EAP funds for the current heating season.

**Great Plains Natural Gas** – Administered by The Salvation Army**GAP – Open**

- Discount on gas bill based on household income and energy use.
- Households with past due balances will also receive a monthly credit towards their balance.
- Household must receive EAP funds for the current heating season.

**MN Power** -**Customer Affordability of Residential Electricity (CARE) - Open**

- Discount on electric bill based on household income and energy use.
- Household must be eligible for EAP but does not have to have benefits go MN Power

**Status update slides**

The EAP slide deck from the April 22, 2021 status update meeting with EAP Coordinators is attached.

## Notices

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### EAP in the news

[Resources for help in paying energy bills](#)

#### ECM Publishers

The Minnesota Department of Commerce has funds available for Energy Assistance...recently approved federal stimulus includes over \$100 million for Minnesota's Energy Assistance Program, nearly doubling the amount of support. Those who qualify could receive significant assistance to help pay energy bills.

## Minnesota Department of Commerce expands Energy Assistance Program so 100,000 more households are eligible

### Citizen voices: Minnesotans receiving Energy Assistance share their views

April 27, 2021 | [Consumers](#), [Energy](#)

Available online at [mn.gov/commerce/media](https://mn.gov/commerce/media)

**Press release translations:** [Hmong press release](#), [Somali press release](#), [Spanish press release](#)

#### Video available:

Commerce Commissioner Grace Arnold [video](#)

Commerce Energy Assistance Program Director Michael Schmitz [video](#)

The Minnesota Department of Commerce has taken action so more Minnesotans can get help on their heating bills, to best serve the urgent needs of Minnesotans affected by COVID-related economic hardships, as well as those facing higher utility bills due to the natural gas price spike in February 2021.

An estimated additional 100,000 Minnesota households are newly eligible for Energy Assistance, through Commerce's action to raise income eligibility. Commerce also extended the time to apply, so Minnesotans can now apply for Energy Assistance through September 1, 2021.

Minnesota's Energy Assistance Program, administered by Commerce, helps households pay energy bills, get reconnected or prevent utility disconnection, learn about energy efficiency and safety, and repair or replace homeowners' broken heating systems. The program is **available to people who rent or own their homes**. In addition, people who apply for the Energy Assistance Program may qualify for free home improvements that lower energy costs through the weatherization program, which provides home energy upgrades at no cost to the homeowner or renter, to lower their energy costs by conserving energy.

Commerce has acted to:

**Extend the deadline** for Energy Assistance Program applications to September 1 for the 2020-2021 season. Applications for next year's season (2021-2022) open on September 2, so there is no break in the ability to apply.

**Raise the income limit** from 50 percent to 60 percent of the state's median income, which adds about another 100,000 Minnesota households as eligible. This is the maximum income limit allowed under federal statute. The increase means a household of four people with annual income up to \$65,228 is eligible for energy assistance (see chart).

Federal stimulus payments and pandemic-related unemployment payments do not count toward the income limit. The Energy Assistance Program considers the household's previous three months of income, so a household with recent job loss or income loss may qualify.

In March 2021, Commerce **doubled the crisis benefit to \$1,200** to help income-eligible households pay past-due utility bills, avoid utility disconnections, and get emergency fuel deliveries.

"Commerce has taken action so as many Minnesotans as possible can get help with their heating bills," said Commerce Commissioner Grace Arnold. "We know there are many people who are struggling to pay utility bills, who lost jobs and income due to the pandemic, and even more people who were hit with utility bills they can't afford due to Minnesota's February cold spell and spike in natural gas prices."

During that 2019-2020 winter season, the Energy Assistance Program served nearly 118,000 Minnesota households – the majority are in Greater Minnesota. Commerce anticipates additional Energy Assistance Program funding from the American Rescue Plan recently approved by Congress and signed by President Biden.

For more information about the natural gas price spike: [State of Minnesota formal investigation](#).

### How to apply for Energy Assistance

Households apply for assistance with the local service provider in their area. Providers are available in every corner of the state. Call 800-657-3710, and press 1, or visit the Commerce's Energy Assistance Program online:

<https://mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp>

Household Size	Annual Income Limit
1	\$33,918
2	\$44,355
3	\$54,791

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4	\$65,228
5	\$75,664
6	\$86,101

### **Citizen voices: Minnesotans who receive Energy Assistance share their views**

Minnesotans who recently received Energy Assistance shared their views with community action partners, among the 29 local service providers the Department of Commerce partners with throughout the state. Here are some of the voices of Minnesotans:

**Household: A senior (age 65+) and disabled adult, with annual income of \$12,800/year:** “Energy Assistance is the difference between life and death. The misery of poverty is enough.”

**Household: A single parent with a disabled child, with an annual income of \$9,000/year:** “I really appreciate and am thankful for the Energy Assistance Program. Since I pay all utilities except for water and garbage, it would be very difficult to keep up with payments through the winter.”

**Household: anonymous** “Your financial help towards my utility bill has afforded me a great deal of relief and has lessened my anxieties in this difficult time. I was brought to tears when you told me I suddenly had a zero balance! God bless you for all you do to help.”

**Household: anonymous** “We both had COVID-19. I was hospitalized and very sick. Still don’t feel well. We didn’t have to worry about heat. We’re on fixed incomes. Thank you so much.”

### **With You Every Day**

Wherever you are in Minnesota, the Department of Commerce is with you every day. Whether you’re filling up on gas, purchasing a home, working to reduce energy consumption or rebuilding after a disaster—we are with you, no matter what.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce oversees more than 20 regulated industries, ensuring that Minnesota businesses are strong and Minnesota consumers are protected. Our mission is to protect the public interest, advocate for Minnesota consumers, ensure a strong, competitive and fair marketplace, strengthen the state’s economic future and serve as a trusted public resource for consumers and businesses. Learn more at [mn.gov/commerce](https://mn.gov/commerce)

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